

San Luis Gonzaga Adobe
Highway #152
Nr. Los Banos, Merced Co.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
San Francisco, California

PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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SAN LUIS GONZAGA ADOBE

Merced County, Los Banos, California

ADDRESS: State Highway No. 152
(About 13 miles West of Los Banos)

OWNER: Miss Paula Fatjo

USE: Residence

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

This oldest of existing adobes in the San Joaquin Valley is to be eliminated by the construction of a Central Valley Project reservoir. The adobe appears to have remained essentially as it was built. The foundations and woodwork have been restored and repaired. The gun ports in the walls are unusual elements in the construction.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A complete history of the Rancho appeared in the Pony Express, Vol. XXVII, No. 5 No. 317, Sonora, California, of October 1960. Written by Dr. Albert Shumate, a Trustee of the California Historical Society, the article is copied, by permission, to give future historians the thoughts of a preservationist of 1960.

Famous Ranch to be Destroyed

In these days when, in the name of progress, freeways, public garages, and other so-called modern improvements are fast destroying our historical heritage, it may be of interest to recall the stirring history of the San Luis Gonzaga Rancho soon to be flooded as part of the Central Valley Water Project.

The story begins when Francisco Perez Pacheco arrived in California in 1819 with an artillery detachment from Mexico. In 1824 he was promoted for bravery in an Indian uprising, and in 1836 and 1840 became the grantee of the Ausaymas and San Filipe Ranches. He bought the San Justo Ranch from Jose Castro in 1839. These

ranches were located in the general area between San Juan Bautista and Gilroy. Today Hollister is located on the old San Justo Ranch.

San Joaquin Valley's Oldest Name Originated in 1805

In 1843 the Rancho San Luis Gonzaga became a Pacheco possession. It had received its name from an expedition of 1805; the creek having been discovered and named on June 21st, the feast day of the Jesuit Saint Aloysius Gonzaga; Luis in Spanish. In 1806 Father Munoz described the area, when accompanying Gabriel Moraga on his trip into the San Joaquin Valley.

The adobe, still standing, was erected near the San Luis waterhole (which was the site of the prehistoric Indian Village, Lis-nay-yuk) soon after the Pacheco's obtained the grant. It is unique in having loopholes for protection against the Indians.

Lt. Ygnacio Martinez Stops Indian Assaults

In 1843 Governor Micheltorena had proposed that a stockade in the Pacheco Pass be built. In A. F. Heizer's book, "The California Indians" it is suggested that this was a shift in basic procedure from the offensive to the defensive, and evidence that the Indian assault was effective at this period. By 1848 the Indian menace was over, but the loopholes still exist, bearing mute evidence of the ancient threat.

In 1846 Fremont crossed from Gavilan Peak into the San Joaquin Valley via the Pass.

Hittell relates "Grizzly Bear" Adams' experiences on the San Luis Ranch in the early 1850's.

Only Activity San Joaquin Valley - 1853

Captain George Derby, the famous "John Phoenix" crossed the Pass in 1849, accompanied by Halleck and Canby (who was destined to be murdered by the Modoc Indians). Derby wrote that the Pass was "found to be of easy practicability for mules, but exceedingly difficult for wagons."

Edgar Kahn, the authority on San Francisco cable cars and on Andrew S. Hallidie, their inventor, published Hallidie's description of his trip from San Francisco to the Kern River Mines in 1853. Hallidie wrote: "For the entire distance with the exception of the Pueblo of San Jose, there were neither towns, villages or settlements, and but one ranch where there was any activity, the St. Luis Ranch on the southeast side of the coast range, after passing over the Pacheco Pass."

Route of Butterfield Mail- St. Louis to San Francisco 1858-61

In 1858 when the famous Butterfield Overland mail was established, the Ranch became an official stopping place. Descriptions were left by the travelers; as for example, Ormsby, who was on the first westbound stage. He describes the Ranch as follows: "The San Luis ranch is just at the entrance of the Pass and is the only house within thirty miles." He speaks of the "hospitable table" and that "it is a great rendezvous for drovers going down into the Valley after cattle."

The Butterfield Line, crossing the continent by the southern route, ceased operations at the outbreak of the Civil War.

In 1930 Francis Farquhar, now President of the California Historical Society, edited the great journal of William H. Brewer, and in the volume, "Up and Down California," interesting accounts occur. His visits were in 1861, 1862, and again in the "dry" year of 1864.

Capt. Love Pursued Murrieta Through Pacheco Pass to Gonzaga Rancho

No historic site in California seems lacking in a tale of the legendary bandit, Joaquin Murrieta. Burns in his "Robin Hood of El Dorado" states: "Harry Love again took the trail. . . . The posse followed the Camino Real up the coast to the Pacheco Pass. There Love learned of the presence of Murrieta and his party at San Luis Gonzaga Rancho. . . . Pacheco Pass, forty miles south of San Jose, was a deep gap in the Coast Range mountains, twenty-five miles through, and in those days was the main highway between the coast and the southern section of the Sierra mining country. At the Western entrance was the immense landed estate of the Pacheco family that gave the Pass its name, and at the eastern end where the Pass opened up into the San Joaquin Valley was San Luis Gonzaga Rancho." Burns has Murrieta cutting his way out of the tent house at the Rancho and thus again escaping!

C.P. R.R. Never Built to Goshen Junction ... May Days at Gonzaga Rancho ... Balloon Ascension

Returning to more orthodox history, one finds in Eldridge's "History 1888 of California" the record of the railroad routes from 1865 to 1870, proposing a line from the coast counties through the Pacheco Pass into the valleys of the San Joaquin, thence to the Colorado River near Fort Mojave. A railroad, it is needless to add, never has been built.

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The famous May Day celebrations are still the great annual event at Los Banos; and Ralph Milliken, the Merced County historian, relates that in 1880, 1881 and 1888 these celebrations took place at the San Luis Gonzaga Ranch. Incidentally, in 1888, a balloon ascension took place!

Henry Miller Leases Rancho ... Later Bing Crosby

With the inauguration of the Henry Miller picnics at the Canal Farm at Los Banos, all other celebrations faded out. In speaking of the great Cattle King, Miller, it may be recalled that until the coming of the railroads to the west side of the Valley in 1890, he drove his cattle by way of Pacheco Pass to San Francisco, having feeding corrals conveniently located in the Pass. He also leased the Rancho for many years, as did a recent "King" -- this time of the movie colony -- Movie King, Bing Crosby!

Bicycle Express Mail - Fresno to San Francisco 1894

A curious incident was recalled by the "Pony Express" in its October 1956 issue. During the Pullman Car strike of 1894, mail was delivered from Fresno to San Francisco by the bicycle! This route was over the Pacheco Pass; thus the old Butterfield Stage station saw a strange new express during the strike.

Naturalist John Muir Entranced

A few of the events which have made this Ranch of historic importance have been recalled. One of the finest descriptions was written by John Muir, California's great naturalist -- "The scenery, too, and all of nature in the Pass is fairly enchanting. Strange and beautiful mountain ferns are there, low in dark canyons and high upon rocky sunlit peaks; banks of blooming shrubs, and sprinklings and gatherings of garment flowers, precious and pure as ever enjoyed the sweets of a mountain home." And as Muir descends he writes of the Valley: "The floweriest piece of world I ever walked, one vast, level, even flower-bed a sheet of flowers, a smooth sea."

At the present time Muir's description still pictures the natural beauty of this unspoiled region.

The San Luis Gonzaga Ranch is owned by the descendants of Francisco Pacheco. It is possibly the only California land grant still in its entirety (over 48,000 acres) owned by the same family to which it was granted.

Paula Fatjo's Arabian Horses

The loopholed adobe, beautifully maintained, is the home

of the charming Miss Paula Fatjo, great grand-daughter of Pacheco's only surviving child. Miss Fatjo retains a small portion around the adobe for her personal use, where she raises Arabian horses.

Voracious Politicians Want Shallow Pleasure Lake

However, this Ranch and its historic adobe is to be covered by the San Luis reservoir. A large, comparatively shallow lake, it will have an enormous loss of water evaporation. Indeed many capable engineers are of the opinion that this type of reservoir is completely outdated. Nevertheless an active voracious group, while crying for the spending of many millions for water needs, really visualize profits resulting from droves of automobiles swarming in for boating and the usual "Coney Island" conditions which accompany crowds..

It has been truly said that the bulldozer enters "frothing at the mouth and tearing up everything in sight."

Preserve Our Precious Heritage

This modern dragon can be stopped from destroying Merced County's oldest building and the oldest house in the San Joaquin Valley if the adobe is moved, a feasible undertaking before the Ranch is flooded.

The California Heritage Council has truly said that Californians travel all over the world to visit traditional and historic buildings, but are often indifferent to the needless destruction of our own precious heritage.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The adobe measures 46 x 21 feet with walls 2 feet thick and 9 feet high. The loopholes, about 4 inches x 8 inches, are preserved on the West and South sides. The wood trim, windows and doors, roof and floors have been replaced and are not considered important historically, although they are in the style of the early construction. The roof appears to maintain the slope shown in the early photographs. Shingles with small exposure have replaced shakes with exposures of 12 inches or more.

The foundations have been reconstructed in concrete and the floor changed from earth to wood. Early construction probably had an open ceiling with trusses held together with rawhide. The present roof structure dates from the 1930's, and a wooden plank ceiling now covers the room.

The arched porch on the eastside was constructed in the 1930's when the building was used as a roadside tavern.

Prepared by

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